



LIBERAL ARTS • BOYS PREPARATORY • GIRLS PREPARATORY • INDEPENDENCE

December 12, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

We hope this communication finds you well and continuing in your efforts on behalf of the State and its educational vision. We want to take this opportunity to share with you our appeal for City University School Boys Preparatory.

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-121 and § 49-13-122, public charter school's governing boards may appeal the denial of their renewal application by a local board of education to the State Board. Due to such, in addition to our brief narrative, please find enclosed the following:

- the renewal application;
- the local school board's annual report(s);
- the charter agreement between City University School Boys Preparatory and the LEA;
- all pertinent correspondences and presentations;
- current student data and summative progress review;
- the local school board's site visit report and any grievances submitted by the charter school regarding the local school board's visit findings; and
- correspondence from the LEA to the governing body regarding the status of the school during the term of the charter and any plans of corrections required by the LEA of the governing body, if applicable.

We look forward to the process and an opportunity to share our vantage point that we believed hampered our ability to garner the immediate renewal from Shelby County Schools for which we believe that our school earned and is qualified.

If further information is necessary, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. R. Lemoyne Robinson, Chancellor of City University Schools at rlemoyne@cityuniversitieschool.org or at 901-526-1944.

Sincerely,

Bobbie Thomas
Board President
City University Schools

Dr. Michael Alston
Board Chair
The Influence1 Foundation

Dr. R. Lemoyne Robinson
Chancellor
City University Schools

A DIVISION OF THE INFLUENCE1 FOUNDATION



City University

School Boys Preparatory

Brief Appeal Narrative

To Discover To Know To Protect

City University School Boys Preparatory was founded principally to support the male youth throughout Shelby County that are often disenfranchised and denied educational access/experiences, particularly in their middle school years, which often leads to a lack of interest in educational success and an increased high school dropout rate among African American boys. Due to such a principle, the school's practices, processes and progress have been key to the success of its scholars in middle school and beyond.

Unfortunately, such an effort is not without risk and disappointment so it is critical to avoid as many roadblocks as possible for these boys who are statistically more likely to experience the inequities of education. Therefore, the school sought to establish a viable partnership with its LEA, as outlined within the school's charter agreement that was signed and executed August 2010. The school was among only five charter operators that were willing to sign the charter agreement at the time because many were assured that the right decision had been made—especially for the scholars of City University School Boys Preparatory.

The five charter operators signed the charter agreement, which included a 3% administrative fee and guaranteed “VIP Access” to district resources for the school and its stakeholders. As gaining access to outlined resources was core to the success of the school and even more critical to the academic support and growth of its male scholars, the school found the contract and the fee to have been a cost-worthy business decision.

Within two years of signing the charter agreement, Memphis City Schools surrendered its charter and was merged into Shelby County Schools. The five operators and the Charter School Office personnel at that time made repeated inquiries regarding the status of the charter agreements that needed to be executed under the auspices and understanding of the new district. However, the response from district administration was that such an effort was not necessary, as all MCS contractual obligations were assumed by SCS and would be reviewed upon expiration. Unfortunately the operators and Charter School Office soon found that not to be the case as the “VIP Access” to district resources (to include online curriculum supports and data tools, such as Tableau) was stalled within the first year of SCS consolidation and would become non-existent by the second year. Despite no longer providing the schools and its stakeholders the promised and much-needed access to the critical resources, the district continued to administratively withhold 3% of the schools' BEP Allocation.

Regrettably, such an action of inequity was the very reason for which the school had entered into the contractual agreement with its LEA—to avoid roadblocks that would hamper the educational access and experiences for populations of greatest needs. After several communications and meetings, it was made clear by the new district administration that the access to resources was no longer a part of the agreement. While the school found this to be a devastating disappointment, it asked in fairness that the administrative fee be discontinued in order to re-direct the necessary funds to acquire the essential academic resources that had now been blocked by the district.

In outlined email communications with SCS Chief Brad Leon, SCS Superintendent Dorsey Hopson and then SCS Board Chair Teresa Jones, all acknowledged the signed and executed charter agreement, but did not believe such a contractual agreement (which included the withholding of an administrative fee) obligated SCS to provide access to district resources for the

school or its scholars. Therefore, the promised “VIP Access” for the five charter operators was unceremoniously suspended. The lack of access to these resources upon which the school had relied was disruptive and greatly affected the school and the academic attainment of its scholars. Within a year of the scholars’ assessment, scores regressed and the school appeared on the CUSP List. By the end of the second year, the school was placed on the High Priority List and was slated for closure by Chief Leon, as he outlined in accordance to State Law.

Despite being denied access to invaluable resources that were once received for its scholars and having limited funds because the school was now unwillingly being assessed an administrative fee by the district, City University School Boys Preparatory was able to borrow the funds necessary to acquire the academic resources and supports on its own. As a result of these efforts, within a year of being placed on the state’s High Priority List, City University School Boys Preparatory (along with Springdale Elementary) was exited from the list because its one-year success rate had surpassed 85% of all other schools across the state. Due to such an achievement, the school (and others) was used as the model in developing turnaround plans and measures of support, as outlined in Tennessee’s ESSA plan.

Although the school understood its boys to be quite capable if provided the critical resources, the excitement of their accomplishments was short-lived, as the upcoming state assessment cycle would experience its own roadblocks. In 2015-16, the statewide assessment for K-8 schools was halted. In 2016-17, City University Schools appealed to the State regarding major logistical and technical errors experienced during that cycle. Although the errors were acknowledged, the state denied the appeal as the problem was not systematic and were only germane to a few schools within SCS. By 2017-2018, the previously outlined errors (and others) were systematic and statewide; therefore, the results could not be considered in high-stakes decisions to include grades, school closure, etc.

Due to such a narrative, it was believed the district would provide overall consideration for City University School Boys Preparatory’s nine years of operation and its scholars’ academic achievement. Unfortunately, as outlined in its later communication, the district stated it would only use the most recent academic data to determine a school’s renewal status and previous years would only be considered for informational purposes. With such a communication, the school, along with its scholars and stakeholders, felt disenfranchised by SCS as the district was without a defined policy regarding charter renewals and was not abiding by the measures of consideration as outlined by the state.

Further as outlined by T.C.A. § 49-13-121 (e) “One (1) year prior to the date on which a charter school is required to submit a renewal application, the chartering authority shall submit to the charter school a performance report that directly reflects the renewal evaluation.” Unfortunately, as outlined in the March 28, 2017 letter, the school did not receive a performance report that directly reflected the renewal evaluation. After several requests for the outlined evaluation tool, the first iteration was not shared until November 2017 during a webinar for the Interim Charter Review Process.

Surprisingly, in January 2018 that tool was significantly modified. Rather than an average of the three core components being a 3 for renewal, the SCS Charter School Office decided that each

component must have an individual score of 3 to be considered for renewal. With the district and its charters having less than 50% of its schools obtaining an SPF of a 3, this change in the process seemed pointedly unfair, especially as defined by the State, "the scope and level of an interim review shall be similar to the review conducted at the end of a school's charter term that is used to determine whether to renew." Despite several requests, SCS offered no explanation for the change and the modified process was presented on March 2018 as the renewal evaluation.

Due to Shelby County Schools' failure to share a performance report that directly reflected the renewal evaluation by April 1, 2017; the SCS Charter School Office's modification to the interim review and charter renewal evaluative tool and SCS's failure to state its reasons for the non-renewal, it is believed that denial of the charter school renewal application for City University School Boys Preparatory is contrary to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-122.

Further, due to a breach in the outlined charter agreement, it is believed the denial of the charter school renewal application was contrary to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-122. As outlined on page 33 of the agreement, within 90 days of submitting its charter renewal application a school would be notified of the district's intent to not renew the charter. If notification is not provided, such an application will be deemed renewed. Please note this is the same contract that SCS acknowledged in previous communications, which provided the district with the contractual right to take an administrative fee (page 31) without providing City University School Boys Preparatory access to promised district resources.

Although it is imperative that consideration be provided to the assurances of a fair and transparent process as outlined by the state, City University School Boys Preparatory also asks that appropriate consideration be given to its renewal due to the school's cumulative value to the Whitehaven community. Currently, the schools in Whitehaven are undergoing great struggles and changes due to the poor educational attainment observed in its elementary and middle schools. City University Schools is working hard to fight the educational blight within its neighboring community by offering its scholars a quality educational choice, aligned with rigorous expectations and defined approaches to discipline that may be uncommon to many students within the neighboring community.

Although the district's nine-year SPF data has a few errors, as outlined by recent accountability reports, City University School Boys Preparatory is making progress toward ensuring the academic achievement of its scholars. These strides are supported by benchmark assessments, which test every scholar quarterly to ensure comprehension of state standards and measures progress—individually and collectively. Based on those results, scholars are grouped and tutored on subjects and standards during Afterschool and Saturday sessions as well as pullout opportunities. In addition to these measures, ensuring the school continued access to critical academic resources, student/parental efficacy, and gleaming best practices from other schools has greatly aided in the movement of the academic needle for the boys in most need.